

HISTORY ON TELEVISION

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The days are certainly over when in education or scholarship the whole emphasis in the study of History could be placed on mere catalogues of rulers and dates of events.⁽¹⁾

The term "History" is therefore to be understood here in its broadest connotations. Now not only is the stress laid on the concatenation and causes of momentous happenings rather than on isolated facts and figures, but it is also recognized that the everyday life of people in particular epochs is no less epoch-making than are the doings and goings-on of particular historical personages. History includes people's ways of thinking as well as of acting, and how they expressed themselves in all kinds of literary and artistic achievements, both in higher forms of art produced by individual classical artists and authors and in folkloristic manifestations fostered by large groups. The presentation of history is quite rightly regarded as faulty if it does not give a good picture of the whole social and cultural background of people and peoples in a period under discussion.

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1. The intimate relationship between history on the one hand and social and cultural anthropology on the other, though sharply contested in the past, has been increasingly recognized and emphasized by scholars in various disciplines. See particularly, Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale*, (Paris 1971) 28ff and the article "Anthropology and History" by E.E. Evans-Pritchard in *Social Anthropology and Other Essays*, (New York 1962) 172-191. Clearly enough, an interdisciplinary as well as a cross-cultural approach is necessary to do justice to the subject under study.

When all this is borne in mind, it is easy to understand why the presentation of history on television became the central issue at a Regional UNESCO Conference of Experts on the "Conservation and Revitalization of Cultural Heritage", which was held at the Mediterranean Conference Centre in Valletta, Malta under the auspices of the UNESCO Division of Cultural Development.⁽²⁾

The author of this article, who suggested the Conference and its theme in the first place and wrote many of the connected documents, now looks back in reflection and singles out for further study some points which he considers to be of particular cross-cultural significance.

It is often contented by media sociologists and by scholars in different fields of culture that the increasing role in life and leisure played by the audio-visual means of social communication has diminished people's interest in their cultural heritage. Museums, theatres and concert halls are less frequented than previously, it is said, and the cultural fare offered on the large screens of the cinema and on the small screens of television sets is either too light to be serious or too heavy to be popular. It was not the purpose of the experts at the Malta Conference either to confirm or to contest such claims. Their attitude was that since television, video-recorders and the other audio-visual techniques that are continually being further improved are bound to play an ever increasing role in life and leisure anyway, it would be far better to consider what could diminish the loss that might result and increase the gain that ought to be made, rather than concern themselves with developments beyond their control. They wished to consider in particular what the audio-visual treatment of historical themes could contribute to the appreciation, assimilation and revivification of cultural heritage.

1. The Living and the Dead

It is not self-evident that the revival of cultural heritage is of itself always desirable. By definition what is inherited must have once belonged to people who are now dead and gone. That is why cultural heritage often carries with it an aura of death or decay, however much it might be alive in the spirit of its inheritors. An undeniable advantage of the audio-visual

(2) The final report and full documents of the proceedings of the UNESCO Regional Conference of Experts on "Cultural Development through the Mass Media – Conservation and Revitalization of Cultural Heritage", which took place in Malta in October 1983 were sent out to participants with a covering letter on the 29th June 1984 by Mr. Godfrey DeMarco, Secretary of the Maltese National Commission for UNESCO. So the author has been able not only to recollect his thoughts and reminiscences in tranquillity but also to check them with the original talks and papers and take into consideration any new development in his further analysis and ponderings of the different points at issue.

treatment of historical themes is that it brings the past to the present, without necessarily taking the present back into the past. The dead are brought back to life as it were, without the living having to descend into the valley of death in order to meet them. On the screen, the people of the past move as though alive, they express their principles and their prejudices, they suffer their sorrows and enjoy their joys, they love and they hate, they create and they destroy in a world that is all their own. They live again, with a difference though; they live their lives in a world of dramatic illusion, for they move in a milieu and in a cultural background different from those of the living. The living can establish no physical contact with them, only spiritual communion.

The dead cannot be brought to life on the screen, unless they are surrounded with the objects they once possessed, the sights their eyes saw, and the sounds that met their ears. Conversely, works of art, literature and music – all that constitutes cultural heritage, in fact – cannot be properly understood except in a historical context. Since historical personages must be placed in the atmosphere and the environment with which they were familiar, producers cannot effectively resurrect the dead on the screen without also realistically recreating their cultural background. Only so can the viewers sitting comfortably at home enter into the spirit of their ancestors' lives. A true meeting with the dead takes place on their home ground, as it were. Though it happens in audio-visual terms, so that the living see what the dead once saw and hear what they once heard, the meeting is mental, not corporal, moral not physical. The viewers can grasp the minds of the dead, but cannot clasp their hands. They can be infected by their follies, but run no risk of contagion from their diseases. So long as the imaginative reliving of a past in the audio-visual media stops at observation or even empathy, it is a revitalization of cultural heritage that is all to the good.

There is another kind of revitalization though, that is not always an unmixed blessing. When revitalization of a dead culture passes from observation to inspiration, and from appreciation to imitation, as recent history both in Europe and elsewhere has painfully shown, the consequences can be more hurtful than helpful. If the faults of bygone generations are uncritically followed and repeated, the result is retardment rather than advancement, obscurantism rather than enlightenment and the stifling rather than the stimulation of genuine cultural growth. In order to avoid such disasters, the appreciation of one's cultural heritage with the help of the audio-visual media must go hand in hand with a critical appraisal that shows what deserves to be reactivated in modern social life and what had better be left undisturbed in its resting place or kept alive only in memory as a dire warning.

2. Styles and Standards

Television programmes deal with history in a wide variety of ways, both in matter and form. Whatever concerns itself with the past on television is really a history programme. It may be a documentary about a very special aspect of life or art in a particular time, recent or remote, or a story – factual or fictional – that unfolds in another epoch. It may be a programme that was conceived from the start for television. On the other hand, it may have made its first appearance in book form. It may have been written originally for the theatre or the cinema. Whatever its origin, all that eventually finds its way to the television screen is for that very reason to be considered as a television programme in its own right. Shakespeare's plays, Goethe's *Egmont* and Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* as well as the colossal film *Cleopatra* all went on the air in the Federal Republic of Germany and are therefore to be considered as part of the television fare offered in that country. These programmes shared broadcasting space with lighter types, such as quizzes where questions were asked about historical persons or events. The cultural value of so-called "pure entertainment" should not be underrated. It cannot be forgotten that many classics made their first appearance as popular shows; Shakespeare's plays are among the best known examples.

Television programmes which deal with history in some form or other differ as much in standard as in approach. Historical films can easily be divided into two broad categories, those with a serious intent to explore and reproduce historical situations as objectively as possible and those where well-known historical heroes or happenings are simply exploited for sensation and spectacle. Prof. M. Verdone of Rome University gave numerous examples of both kinds from the Italian cinema.³ The majority of films with historical themes fall between these two categories. They go down the whole scale from those that are careful not to depart from what can be conclusively documented to others that have nothing historical about them other than high sounding names and dazzling dresses. At their best, feature films and television serials dealing with history not only retrace and revive the past in sight and sound in a way that is accessible to the general public, but also perform the exploratory task of historical essays, making a genuine contribution to scholarly research.

3. As a historian of the cinema, Prof. Verdone traced the beginning of a genuine historical treatment in film form to "The Battle of Sebastopol" produced in Russia in 1911. "Il est film historique qui essaye de reconstruire les événements, la stratégie même de la bataille, les épisodes principaux. Les réalisateurs ne négligent pas le conseil des militaires de l'époque et, cela est très curieux, à la fin du film on peut voir les survivants mêmes de la bataille, présentés au public comme s'il était un photo-souvenir".

Just as with standards, the division of styles into two broad categories is easy enough. It is where to put the majority of programmes that raises problems, for these usually lie somewhere in-between. There is an almost infinite gamut of shades and levels between the clear-cut cases. It used to be easy for instance, to separate dramas from documentaries as entirely different genres, as though the two had nothing in common with one another. Now, it is developing into an almost regular procedure for producers to insert documentary material in dramatic presentations, and on the other hand to use dramatic reconstructions of events in documentary films. Examples of this are: *Holocaust*, *Roots*, *Das Boot* and *From a Far Country*. They include biographical material at times of still living persons, documentary films and newsreels, together with fictional characters and situations. On the other hand, a documentary made in the Federal Republic of Germany to commemorate Karl Marx' centenary made much use of excerpts from feature films, most of them from the Soviet Union. There are also examples of what have been called "dramatized documentaries", where recent events or long past historical happenings are reconstructed in a dramatic way as though they were taking place here and now. It is indeed one of the basic qualities of television as a medium that it gives viewers the feeling of being actually present when an event appears quite independently of distances of place and time.

The dividing line between documentaries and dramatizations is perhaps at its thinnest in filmed biographies. The WDR's colourful production of 'Mozart' for instance, and the film 'Amadeus' that won the highest number of 1985 Oscars, both deal with the same historical person in a similar way: they achieve the visual and auditory appeal of the "colossal screen epics", but also stick closely to historical facts. There are many examples of filmed biographies of great artists like Van Gogh, scientists like Einstein and political figures like Eva Peron where full media appeal together with accuracy in historical reconstruction are striven for, as though the producers sought to combine the advantages of dramatizations with those of documentaries.

However thin the dividing line between documentaries and dramatizations may be in certain cases, it is right to consider them separately, since the contribution they make to the preservation and the revitalization of cultural heritage is specific to each of these broad divisions.

3. The Heroic and the Human

A history play would certainly be among the last places where a scholar concerned with absolute accuracy would look for source material. Even so, the history plays by Shakespeare and Schiller have always been valued for

their cultural worth and the insights they provide into the unfolding of human destiny. It is considered legitimate for such authors to sacrifice accuracy in particulars for the sake of a deeper understanding of human nature in general and a profounder psychological penetration into the minds of individuals who played a gigantic role in the shaping of human destiny. Though such works are more studies of humanity than of history and are concerned more with interpretation of why an event happened than with investigation into exactly how it happened, they deserve to be appreciated as valid contributions to the study of cultural anthropology.

The mixture of fictional characters with real people and of imagined situations with factual happenings that often occurs in dramatizations can provide valuable insights. When it is borne in mind that common people in a particular time are as important to the study of cultural anthropology as are historical and heroic personages, the presentation of typical fictional characters who exemplify, symbolize and stand for the ordinary individual in a given historical context is not only a valid procedure, but also a valuable contribution to the understanding of historical situations and of cultural heritage. This was already recognized by the dramatists of Ancient Greece. The *choruses* they used to comment what they showed spectators or to tell them what they did not but before their eyes, really expressed the views and sentiments of the ordinary people on the street about doings and destinies of royal personages in sumptuous palaces.

The value of historical dramatisations on the media from an anthropological and social point of view naturally depends on how genuinely the whole life and literature, leisure and work, figurative art and music, beliefs and customs of all sections of the population in a given period is put across. It is also conditioned by the way the chief characters in the drama are brought to life before a present day audience. Broadly speaking, the chief characters of historical films or TV serials fall into three classes: The shapers, the witnesses or the victims of history.

Films and TV Series that clearly belong to the first category are: *Lawrence of Arabia*, the remarkable Egyptian production *Saleh ed Din*, *Cleopatra*, *Marco Polo* and Sacha-Guitry's *Napoleon*, to mention but a few. In the feature films and television serials where the hero as a shaper of history strides across the screen like a Colossus, one notices that the emphasis is often placed not so much on heroic achievements as on the human side of the hero. Much depends on the producer's point of view. If the hero has become a national or a religious symbol of a particular culture, the kind of super human-aura with which tradition and official history have invested him cannot be entirely removed, but even so he is as it were embodied in the flesh and blood of the actor and seen to be basically a man like the rest of us, however much head and shoulders above us he may be.

Napoleon, for instance, in Sacha-Guitry's 1954 film is seen through the cynical eyes of the contemporary Tallyrand and is cut down to the size of a true mortal, even if an extraordinary one, who is eminently human, with rather more faults than virtues, in spite of all his genius and personal seal he stamped on history. This is the general trend when dealing with most shapers of history. In this way, a true service is rendered from the psychological and anthropological points of view by bringing the heroic and the human closer to one another, and therefore closer to the common people of today. It is a kind of twofold democracy reaching out into the past: great personages are seen principally as people like all others, and dead heroes come alive with all their very human vices and virtues.

Historical periods, rather than people come to the fore in the second class of dramatic media presentations, where the chief characters are spectators of an epoch rather than shapers of it. Examples of successful TV Series that clearly fall into the class are: *Upstairs-Downstairs* and *Backdoor to the White House*. This approach too, can be of considerable value from the psychological and anthropological views of cultural heritage. The chief characters in such productions correspond in practice to the *choruses* in Ancient Greek Drama even though their role and function in the story is in their case so much more important. They are to be taken as representatives of the common man. They can see all that concerns the civilization of a particular era in a more detached way than the giants who shaped it, for they show us how great events affected simple, average people, resembling the ordinary folk of today. This too is a contribution to democratization of culture.⁽⁴⁾

The third kind of production like *Holocaust* and *Roots*, where the chief characters are victims of history, elevates the heroes of the series into symbols of successful resistance against attempts to stamp out a particular culture. They are therefore symbolic figures of the survival and of the later revival of the threatened culture for which they stand. So, in a paradoxical way, victims of history can turn out to be also, in the long run, the shapers of civilized living.

4. Scattered and Structured Information

Although dramatizations have a formidable impact on the viewing public, the information they impart about history and cultural heritage

4. It is true that in Ancient Greek tragedy, royal personages were the heroes at the centre of attention. This fact which was so strongly stressed by literary critics such as Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis* (Princeton, U.S.A. 1953), does not in any way invalidate the point here made that through the choruses the views and sentiments of ordinary people got a good airing.

reaches the receivers in a scattered, rather haphazard way: fictional characters rub shoulders with people who really existed, while imagined situations come across as forcefully as real happenings. It is only in documentaries that the items of knowledge that are presented to the public are structured beforehand, so that receivers can easily classify and codify them in their minds. Referring to *Holocaust* and some German dramatizations based on the Nazi persecution of the Jews, the Controller of Deutsche Welle, Herr Klaus Schütz, who represented the Federal Republic of Germany at the Malta Conference, pointed out how in his country the broadcasting authorities had previously put on the air a number of documentaries on the subject. However, it was only when the fictional story of *Holocaust* was shown on television that the population was shocked into the realization of the full horror of the real facts in this dark period of their history. The viewers were able to identify themselves with the Weiss family in *Holocaust* and with other victims of persecution in similar serials dealing with the same subject, such as the German productions of *The Oppermann Brothers* and *Ein Stück Himmel* ("A Bit of Sky"). As soon as the cords of human sympathy were struck, the way to deeper knowledge was effectively opened, whereas it had remained apparently closed as long as appeal had been made only to the intellect.

Dispassionate information given through documentaries sticking to proven facts often fails to achieve what an appeal to the whole personality can very well succeed in doing. Yet, though the heart has its valid reasons that contribute to the understanding of history, a systematic ordering of knowledge that sorts out fact from fiction, the mainly objective from the largely subjective and the emotional from the intellectual remains indispensable for a balanced judgement. A systematic appraisal of the actual sequence of events and of causes and effects can be given only in well planned and structured documentaries. If viewers are not to be left to their own resources in evaluating and ordering isolated items of knowledge into coherent patterns, however small the effectiveness of documentaries alone may be, they must continue to share viewing time with other types of programmes and go hand in hand with history plays. The loss to culture would be irreparable if too much concern with audience gratifications charts were to drive documentaries off the air altogether.

According to the findings of audience research, the general public consider dramas as more interesting than documentations. However, there is no reason why documentaries on the media should be regarded as being generally as dry as dust. Producers can call upon all the resources of recorded or reconstructed sounds and sights to bring to life the situations they are portraying and the facts they are analysing. A proof of this is the number of documentary series that have actually achieved an international

success that almost rivals that achieved by drama series. Examples of this are: Sir Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*, Yehudi Menuhin's serial about Music and Dame Margot Fontaine's about the development of the Ballet. In all these documentaries, the producers made the most of the human interest behind big names and the visual and auditory charms that are inherent to the subjects and to the medium of television. Big names need not only be those of people, they can also belong to places: cities, museums and theatres for instance that are famous throughout the world. One also notes that in documentaries which have achieved world-wide success, the speakers make much use of anecdotes. However much historical analysis and theoretical discussion there may be, individual persons are never left out of the picture.

It is possible that new developments in the field of media technology will make extensive popular success unnecessary as a prerequisite for television productions. We seem to be already approaching the time when audio-visual productions for restricted groups will become as frequent as are publications of books for specialized classes at present. In countries where video-recorders and cameras are accessible to large numbers, groups that feel they are denied a fair share of air time on the regular networks are producing their own video programmes. The French Delegate to the Conference, Monsieur Darbois from Paris, himself a producer of documentaries, called attention to new technical advances in video-discs which enable the storing of an enormous amount of information in a very restricted space. This could mean a new boost to documentaries, making them still more accessible for use in lecture halls, classrooms and at home. This availability of documentaries for small audiences however, can be no more than a consolation prize, for a wide general public will always remain something to strive for. It is to be hoped then, that big first prizes too, with large international audiences will never be lacking.

Another way of helping to win larger publics for documentaries should be looked into at this point. It is to make them part of the news, as it were. Current affairs cannot be entirely separated from what goes on the air. The BBC producer, Mr. Alan Shallcross, who represented the U.K. at the Malta UNESCO Conference, explained how in his country the national situation is reflected in all that goes on the air, and conversely whatever goes on the air is in its turn considered part of the news.⁵ So documentaries about the

5. BBC-TV has two separate departments that produce plays and series based on Britain's literary and historical heritage. Alan Shallcross, refers for instance to the current plan at the BBC to do all of Shakespeare's 37 plays for television over a period of 7 years. See also the present author's article "Words into Images: Televising Stories from the Classics", *Cultures* (UNESCO, Paris 1978). Alan Shallcross stresses how in these plays based on English literature and history, English music and other elements from Britain's Cultural Heritage find a

past become indeed part of the present. Another example of this is how the 50th anniversary of Hitler's seizure of power was commemorated by the television networks of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1982. It was then that *Holocaust* was broadcast for the second time, *The Oppermann Brothers* for the first time, and with them several documentaries. This broadcasting event was widely discussed in the press. This "global approach" mobilizes dramas, documentaries and commemorations of anniversaries, so that all reinforce and further explain one another and all become themselves part of the news in a particular way.

The global approach in programming can be matched by a global approach in production, thanks to recent advances made in multimedia techniques and practices. Communication experts used to spend much time arguing about the relative advantages and disadvantages of books and "the box", the screen and the stage.⁶ What could be put across in writing was compared and contrasted to what could be conveyed in audio-visual terms. Now, writing and audio-visual presentation need no longer be considered as competing with one another, but as complementing each other. In 1984 the encyclopaedia "*Die Grosse Bertelsmann Lexikotek*" was published in Germany which contains not only illustrated books but also "talking books". There are not only coloured pictures, but also pages with small plastic records that carry the voices of the prominent people mentioned in the particular articles. Only a relatively small technical step is needed before books will be able to carry moving pictures as well as voices and static illustrations. On the other hand, television sets already broadcast "Video Texts" in writing. We are on the threshold of a multimedia age where a global approach to communication techniques and practices will be the order of the day.

5. The Recent and the Remote

News and Current Affairs really deal with history. This is often forgotten when the presentation of history on television is discussed. It was a point that was stressed in the discussions at the Malta Conference on the Conservation and Revitalization of Cultural Heritage. Current Affairs, by definition, are taken to concern the present. On the other hand, philosophers rightly point out that by the time one takes note of the present

prominent role. These TV productions are closely followed by the population almost like the daily news: "Television was a major cohesive force in society – it gave the people a common source of gossip."

6. The present author himself has gone into this issue in his article "Television and Culture: The Image and the Written Word", *Cultures* (UNESCO; Paris 1979).

it has already become the past. So Current Affairs are really recent history. They concern the recent past and are therefore already in a sense part of Cultural Heritage. What distinguishes stories about the present from accounts of past events is simply that the former deal with recent history whereas the latter deal with remoter times; it is just a question of more recent or more remote.

One need not have much journalistic experience to realise that a thorough report about a recent occurrence or a present state of affairs is hardly possible without reaching out into remoter times. The roots of the recent past must be sought in history. A good news story has to be historical in perspective. Journalists are often accused of culpable bias when reporting events in foreign countries, particularly if these countries belong to a different cultural region. Such accusations of bad will are often quite unjustified. They fail to take into account the inevitable role of the imagination in reporting stories of every possible kind, whether they be true ones or simply invented ones, based fully or partly on fact or utterly fictitious. It is in the nature of things that narrators have to rely on their imagination when selecting, structuring, exposing and explaining story material. It is equally inevitable that one's imagination is conditioned by one's cultural background, that is, one's cultural inheritance as well as one's personal perceptions and perspectives. Misunderstandings of the background to events in other countries and cultural areas are bound to occur when a reporter's historical perspective is not broad enough to guide the imagination in fashioning reports. That is why a good foreign correspondent must be a person of at least two cultures, that of the country of origin and that of the country of residence, the country that receives the reports and the country that occasions them.⁽⁷⁾

7. What is here said about foreign correspondents applies equally forcefully to radio and television networks that prepare programmes for overseas. The Controller of Deutsche Welle, Herr Klaus Schütz, a former Ruling Mayor of Berlin and Ambassador with experience both of administration at home and diplomacy abroad, stressed how the cultural heritage of recipient countries is carefully taken into account by his network. He explained how the Deutsche Welle had invited stations in Latin America, Africa and Asia to participate in a workshop on international co-productions. It is his conviction that "any particular culture defines itself as a culture in that it is receptive to other cultures and other cultural influences, that it is prepared to enter a dialogue to exchange ideas and forms of expressions. This does not exclude the fact that cultures live from their origins and are fed and regenerated by them, that they also remain aware of these origins and always reassess them in the process of development". Prof. Edward Ille expressed similar views. "Objectivement, il n'y a aucun danger d'une influence négative d'un message qui serait tiré d'une diffusion de l'héritage culturel d'autrui étant donné que les receveurs du message le capte à travers le prisme de leurs propres normes. Par conséquent, on ne peut imposer un système de valeurs et de comportement qui s'opposeraient ouvertement à nos propres valeurs et cultures. Au contraire, on pourrait parler d'un enrichissement des diverses cultures à travers une connaissance réciproque."

A necessary condition for the appreciation of a country's culture is a thorough knowledge of its history. It can be doubted at times, however, whether delving into the remoter past is actually more of a help than a hindrance in fostering understanding between nations with different cultural heritages. Senor Marinas Otero, the Spanish Delegate, observed how history plays and films nearly always deal with wars. The Chairman of the Conference, Rev. Dionysius Mintoff, Director of the Peace Laboratory in Malta, joined in deploring this fact. If stressing cultural heritage is to result in stirring up traditional enmities one can well question the value of doing so. Whenever one delves into the more distant past, when both lines of communication and communication techniques between distant communities spread all over the world were little developed, one finds that individual cultures grew almost in isolation from one another, bearing their own special mark, with a separate way of life, local artistic and literary forms as well as individual institutional structures. The further you go into the past therefore, the less is the homogeneity of cultural development and the greater are the contrasts and contradictions. Often enough, the cultural differences led to fatal conflicts, so that the rare meetings of cultures often resulted in their colliding rather than in their combining.

The vast improvement in travelling facilities has led to the breakdown of isolation. So too have the mass media that provide means for armchair travelling both in the present and in the past. The Italian TV Serial about the celebrated traveller Marco Polo which won a deserved international success turned viewers into witnesses of a peaceful meeting of diverse cultures in the 13th century. It also showed how distrust between people living worlds apart and with vastly different cultures can be broken down when one does not confine oneself to reporting conflicts and wars, but tries instead to seek the basic human unity behind the diversity, indeed *in* the cultural diversity itself. Diversity does not imply divisiveness, nor should it lead to it. The meeting of West and 'Far' East that started with Marco Polo's voyages and journeys has enriched the cultural heritage of both East and West. It would be a false and fatal reading of history to conclude that one cannot love what is one's own without shunning or even hating what is somebody else's heritage. Cultural in-breeding can be as deforming as biological. Contrariwise, cross-fertilization of culture can be as fruitful as botanical.

The spiritual journeying with one's imagination from recent past to remoter past that is facilitated especially by the audio-visual media has the advantage of putting a particular historical epoch and the culture inextricably bound up with it into proper perspective. Human relationships, institutional set-ups, social and economic structures as well as art and literature are seen in better proportions when viewed from the perspective

of a time distance. This brings out and stresses their relativity: the foe of a few years ago was the friend of some centuries ago and the other way round. One can witness the progressive breaking down of isolation between cultures that has been leading gradually to the emergence of an overall worldwide culture that can be shared equally by different classes, nationalities, races and religions without necessarily implying the imposition of uniformity. The human oneness behind the cultural variety is what stands out most, but the realization of this does not demand the giving up of even one jot of one's own cultural heritage.

The producers of such series as *Marco Polo* show news reporters how to perform their tasks of breaking down barriers between countries and building bridges between cultures. The way a reporter sees an event inevitably determines the angle from which it is reported. The story-slant is often no more than the reporter's historical perspective. News reporters are products of their own inherited culture where the view of foreigners is unfortunately more often than not deeply influenced by clichés, stereotypes and other generalizations instilled from early childhood. Here, the foreign correspondent should take a leaf out of the anthropologist's book and as it used to be said "go native". The better one gets to know the language, the customs, institutions, art and literature, all the cultural manifestations in fact, of the country one is reporting about, the better is one able to understand the distant background of recent events and of present situations there. On the other hand, one must not cease to belong to the cultural group for whom one is reporting, if one does not wish to cease to be understood over there.

6. The Inherited and the Borrowed

It is precisely in the new ease of communication and communications that facilitates the bridging of cultures, and in the resulting incipient emergence of an overall cross-cultural framework in which all can participate with the advantages that this implies, where many see also one great disadvantage: an imminent danger of the loss of one's cultural identity. Is a uniform culture emerging that will leave no room for local variations and stamp out all that is particular, so that no culture can have a character of its own? This is a question that loomed large in the discussions at the Regional UNESCO Experts' Conference.

Malta was not an inappropriate land where to raise such a question, nor was the Valletta Mediterranean Conference Centre an inappropriate place for a thorough discussion of it. The meeting place of the Conference symbolized the question and also suggested some answers. Malta has preserved its own cultural identity throughout centuries when it was ruled by

outsiders. On the other hand, not only has it not scorned to learn from these outsiders but it has integrated their cultures into its own. Malta has remained Maltese without ceasing to be also thoroughly European and Mediterranean in its outlook and its outward looks.

In his opening address, the then Minister of Education and Chairman of the Maltese National Commission for UNESCO, Dr. Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici referred to the building in which the Delegates were meeting. It was built by the Knights of Malta in 1574 to become one of the best equipped and most efficiently run hospitals in Europe at the time, though it would not be able to meet the requirements of medical science today. Now, it has been turned into a Conference Centre with all the required modern facilities to fulfil its new functions. Here was a part of Malta's ancient heritage continuing to serve human needs, even while changes were necessary to adapt it for its new role. Similarly, traditional artistic material and forms can be adapted to suit the communications media of today without losing thereby their original force or doing violence to the particular qualities of the media. Thus, cultural identity can be not only preserved but also injected with new life through appropriate changes. Dr. Ladislav Gaulik, Director of the Institute of Research and Culture in Prague, the Delegate to the Valletta Conference from Czechoslovakia took up this theme and showed how even the most ancient literary works, such as epics, can be suitably adapted to the new electronic media. Mr. Iván Vitányi, Director of the Institute for Culture in Budapest, who was the Hungarian Delegate, pointed out how this adaptability applied not only to classical "high art" but also to folklore, which was more closely bound up with national identity as it arose from the people of a particular place. When the traditional arts are reinserted into present living expressions, a creative process is set afoot that results into what can be termed "a new generative culture" which duly preserved cultural identity.

Prof. Edward Ille called the Delegates' attention to the numerous linguistic groups in his country, Yugoslavia, and asked what chances there were for the survival of the cultural identity of these groups in the face of competition from media organizations backed by much larger cultural entities. This problem in a country with numerous cultural minorities like Yugoslavia was a reflection on the national scale of the gigantic difficulties in the international sphere where super-multinational commercial concerns dominated the field, threatening to stamp out local cultural identity. Television productions, particularly "Television Sagas" – long serials about powerful families – came up for discussion. Their worldwide dominance of the field of television broadcasting at the expense of local productions was extensively examined. Then the secret of their appeal was analysed. The suggestion was put forward that commercial television series

such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* have really rediscovered and revived ancient sources of story material and old formulas for story construction: the family feud and the struggle for succession to high office. Indeed, the very title of *Dynasty* implies this, as it calls to mind the struggles in royal families of kings and tribal chiefs. Such serials were also something like fairy tales in a 20th century setting, with oil millionaires replacing princes and princesses. The average viewer is as far removed from the world of multimillionaires and directors of multinational companies as the child is from the world of wicked step-mothers, witches and good fairies. Adult viewers no less than children enjoy the escapism of day-dreaming and love to see their everyday problems magnified and blown out of all proper proportions. They imagine themselves in the place of their social betters, but at the same time they are glad to observe that the great ones of this world have no fewer problems than ordinary folk like themselves.

If it is true that television producers of supernational commercial enterprises have rediscovered themes and treatments of stories from the world of myths and primitive social institutions, then it is surely possible to reverse the process and return these stories to their original settings. In the cultural heritage of almost every linguistic group for instance, family feuds and clashes between clans, prehistoric myths and fairy tales are to be found and these can be exploited suitably as material for television productions.

7. Cultural Identity and Development

Though in theory, source material for effective television can undoubtedly be found in a particular country's own cultural heritage, in practice, financial considerations⁽⁸⁾ among other problems often stand in the way. It is usually both easier and cheaper simply to take over ready-made programmes offered by the large international networks, than to make one's own, unless one has not only the technical know-how and studio facilities but also the necessary financial backing. In the field of the mass media no less than in the world of industry in general, mass production is more economical than individual treatment. On the other hand, here too, unity gives strength. It was suggested at the Valletta Conference that the smaller countries and cultural groups should pool their resources and create banks of material in order to prevent being swamped by productions from the wealthier countries and to be able to safeguard their own cultural identity. In his concluding address to the Conference, the former Minister

8. Senor Marinas Otero, a newspaper owner and publisher, devoted an entire paper to the study of the economic aspects of the case.

for Foreign Affairs and Culture, Dr. Alex Sceberras Trigona stressed the need for taking the initiative and for regional co-operation between smaller nations in making, storing and broadcasting productions that reflect their individual cultural identity.

In the course of the debates during the Conference, the many-sided problems involved in inserting elements from cultural heritage into new productions got a good airing. Primitive artistic forms and ethical standards taken from a particular country's past can be even more foreign to the present day population of that country than those imported from abroad. The average Italian has more in common in his outlook with a North or South American than with an Ancient Roman. It would be truly madness if on the pretext of reviving the cultural heritage of Ancient Rome one were to return to the building methods of that age, remarkable as they were for the times, or worse still is one were to suggest the restoration of the power of life and death over wife and children that the head of a Roman family, the *pater familias*, once enjoyed. Technical solutions and ethical standards that have been discarded as faulty in the course of the evolution of human thinking and technology are not to be reinstated with all their shortcomings, simply on the score of reviving elements taken from one's cultural heritage.

One can be lost in admiration for the achievements of the Ancient Romans in building and legislation, without in any way wishing to advocate a return to their out-moded methods of construction or their overhauled legal system. Yet, it should be clear that a place must be allocated to these in television productions that deal with Roman times. When intending to reinject elements from cultural heritage into the mainstream of present-day culture a reverse process must be followed from that to be followed when the purpose is careful observation and deeper understanding. The proper analysis of the various components of cultural heritage requires that the parts be considered in conjunction with the whole, now on the contrary, when it comes to reworking them into a new production, various elements of substance and form must be detached from the rest in order to be given a new life in a new setting.

An example of how this works out in practice can be taken from a recognized 20th century artistic masterpiece, Igor Stravinsky's ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (1911-13), which was inspired by man's primordial attempt to come to terms with the forces of nature through ritual and worship. The fertility rites which are at the roots of the composer's inspiration are obviously not reenacted in their primeval, cruel reality when they were embedded in the whole culture of a time before the ethical values that forbid human sacrifice had firmly established themselves in the consciousness of mankind. Nor did the composer confine himself to the use of musical instruments and styles that prevailed at such a period, but on the

contrary he availed himself of all the resources of musical composition and instrumentalization that were at his command. This reevocation in dance form of a primordial rite, based as it is on an element of cultural heritage probably common to the whole of mankind, has the great anthropological value of showing something that lies deep at the roots of human nature. One sees then, how Stravinsky detached factors belonging to cultural heritage from their original situation in life in order to rework them under his overriding inspiration into a completely new entity in a new medium and with a new social function. When Stravinsky's ballet is recorded for television, still more factors with even newer techniques come into play and have to be harmoniously integrated into the final production under the overall planning and guidance of the director.

Another Stravinsky ballet, *Pulcinella*, also with a subject taken from cultural heritage though not so universal or so ancient, the Italian "Comedia dell'Arte" that has left its mark on the culture of many lands, was recently televised in Germany. The full mobility of television cameras was used together with all the technical resources at the director's command to weld together all the different, and previously disparate elements, both old and new, into one artistic whole for the viewer's benefit.

Together with these examples from the "high art" of classical ballet, one could consider another from folk-dance, in order to throw more light on the relationship between cultural identity and cultural development. In Hungary, a spontaneous movement among young people led to the establishment of "Dance Houses".⁹ Here, traditional Hungarian folk-dances are performed instead of the usual fashionable ones. Television broadcasting is part of the movement, for it does not simply record the dances for the viewers at home, but encourages, stimulates and inspires the dancers themselves.

Cultural heritage is of different kinds: that with its deep roots in the human nature common to all, that with an extensive regional character and that with a strongly local flavour. All these kinds deserve to find a prominent place in the modern media to which they are well suited. The result will be considerable enrichment of media content and vigorous

9. The author of this article was among the Delegates to the UNESCO Regional Conference of Experts held in Budapest in 1979, who were given an opportunity to see for themselves how these "Dance Houses" function. Mr. Iván Vitányi referred to dance houses in his talk at the Valletta Conference: "The evolution of a new folklore is more than wishful thinking, as is shown for instance, by a renaissance of folklore in many parts of the world and more so, by endeavours to reinstate folklore in daily life instead of preserving it merely in the framework of museums and stages. As an example is the dance house movement in Hungary, prompting the urban youth to sing, dance and reproduce folklore in music for their own entertainment in daily costumes and under everyday circumstances".

revitalization of cultural heritage. The building where the Malta Conference took place is a concrete embodiment and synthesis of the points made during the discussions there. "Dar il-Mediterran" to name it by its Maltese name, is a symbol of how cultural heritage can not only be preserved in its own full identity, but also revitalized to become part of the mainstream of present-day life and culture.

8. The Debate Continues

The success of a Conference is not measured solely by the answers it gives to ever-recurring questions, as these answers must of necessity be in the main only partial and provisional. Rather, it should be measured by the discussions it stimulated and by the points of reference and the directions for further studies that it indicated. On this score, the Regional UNESCO Conference of Experts held in Malta deserves to be considered a success, but the debate must continue. Several points that emerged in the course of the discussions are of vital interest everywhere, for they touch matters that require deeper investigation and must be tackled again and again in different times, in different places and in different ways, going as they do to the roots of cultural heritage and cross-cultural communication.

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